

ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*: THE SAGA OF BURNING DREAMS IN THE INFURIATED EYES OF AN INDIAN CHILD

DHANESH MOHAN BARTWAL

Assistant Professor, Department of English, THDC- Institute of Hydropower Engineering and Technology,
Tehir Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India

ABSTRACT

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, which was awarded the Britain's Prestigious fortieth 'Man Booker Prize' in 2008, is in the epistolary form which presents the evil effects of this money-oriented era. The novel is a form of seven- part letter written by the protagonist Balram of the novel to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. The novel is a small account of history of an underclass protagonist who starts his journey for his identity from darkness to lightness. Also presents the pathetic condition and struggle of an underclass boy to get rid of his age old underclass condition. Through Balram, the novelist tries to highlight social and mantle exploited condition of the underclass in this twenty first century which is known for its development. The present paper is an effort to find out the suffering of an optimistic poor underclass child who suffers not by his mistakes but to be born and brought up in the underclass society. The paper also highlights the actions and deeds of the 'Karma Yogi' protagonist who faces a lot of exploitation and humiliation, and instead of this, he creates the accurate paths for him to become a successful entrepreneur.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneur, Exploited Condition, Karma Yogi, Money, Oriented Era, Twenty First Century, Underclass

INTRODUCTION

Indo- Anglian literature is based on different themes and issues of Indian society. The aim of this literature is not only to amuse but correct the Indian society. India is the land of different types of languages and other language writers have also opted different types of vital subjects and aspects for their writings. Some prominent writers like Munsri Prem Chand, in Hindi, highlighted suppressed lower caste, class, labourers, farmers and peasants social condition, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, in Bengali, wrote about Bengali's society, and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagor, in Bengali, presented the attitude and customs of aristocrat higher families of Bengal. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, the founding fathers of Indo- Anglian fiction, portray an authentic picture of Indian society with different types of hues of social issues and subjects.

Raja Rao's famous novel *Kanthapura* is based on the early faces of India's struggle for freedom. The novel is an account of a village and its villagers who found their living identification through temple, river, hill, mound, pet- animals as well as small market of the village. There is no other source of living identification, and exploitations as well as humiliations of higher class have raised question mark for the identification of the poor villagers. K.A. Abbas in his novel *Tomorrow is Ours* writes, "the exploitation of the poor Indians by the rich Indian" (Harrex, p. 218).

R.K. Narayan is a very different writer from Anand and Raja Rao. His fictional town, Malgudi, is very famous in between the readers of Indian English fiction. He has created the middle class world of the small town, modernity has affected this society but not properly.

Just like Charles Dickens and Galsworthy, the purpose of Mulk Raj Anand's writings is to focus the attention of public on the miseries and hardships of the poor underdog of Indian society. His second novel *Coolie* is a story of an orphan boy Munoo who suffers not only because of his mistakes but by taking birth in poor family. The novel also highlights the flaws of Indian urban life like child labour, inequality, class system, poverty, social injustice, unemployment, lack of opportunities, inhumanity, inequality, capitalist exploitation and humiliation, and physical abuse in the pre-independent India.

Aravind Adiga has won the Britain's prestigious fortieth Man Booker Prize for his first and debut novel *The White Tiger* in 2008 and he "has taken an exhilarating ride through the darkest alleys of modern India" (Prasannarajan, "Alone in Dusklend," p. 7) in this epistolary form of novel. The novel is an account of poor protagonist Balram Halwai's struggle in this twenty first century. In the novel, Balram narrates his life's story, from rags to riches, as a worker in village tea shop to a prosperous entrepreneur in Bangalore, in the form of series of letters to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao who wished to visit Bangalore for getting better understanding about entrepreneurship in India because for the last couple of years India is emerging as a powerful economic country in the sky of twenty first century. The story of protagonist starts from his native place Laxmangarh, the rural darkness of shining India, where "basic necessities such as clean water, a home, money and health are routinely snatched away by the wealthy, who live up there in the light" (Rushby, k.). In the defense of this epistolary form, Adiga says:

It is a story he can never tell anyone because it involves murder in the real life; now he Tells it when no one is around. Like all Indians, who are obsessed with the outsider's gaze He is stimulated to think about his country and society by the imminent arrival of a Foreigner, and an important one. So he talks about himself and his country in the solitude Of his room. (*The Sunday Times of India*, April 6, 2008)

Adiga, in the novel, presented two different India in on: "an India of Light and an India of Darkness" (Adiga, p. 14). India of Light, residing in metropolitan and big cities, is famous for easy availabilities and facilities like ample education and job opportunities, hospitals, transportation facilities, electricity and running water supply, justice and aspirations for comfortable life, which are essential parts of human life, and without these things human life cannot be imagined. But, on the other hand, the life of India of Darkness residing in poor filthy villages and rural areas that is completely opposite the first. Scarcity of foods and water, injustice, the faded future of children, lack of opportunities, unhealthy and unhygienic atmosphere, exploitation and humiliation are the features of India of Darkness. Balram narrates about it, "the ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India- the black river" (p.14).

Adiga presents the pathetic condition of education system in India of Darkness through the example of Laxmangarh. In the novel, although, the school teacher replaces protagonist's name from Munna, "it just means boy" (p.15) which is neither given by his mother because his, "mother's very ill..... she lies in bed and spews blood. She's got no time to name" nor his father because he "is a rickshaw puller" and "he's got no time to name" (p.15) protagonist, to Balram but he is corrupted also. This is the matter of irony that there is only one teacher in the school and he is not sincere for his duties. He is taking siesta during school hour and drinks toddy, kind of alcohol, in the school. And, this "big- Pann- and spit Man" (p.29) does not issue the free of cost truck full uniform that government sent to school for poor children and, "a week later they turned up for sale in the neighbouring village." (p.33) The Mid-Day Meal of school went to teacher's home and he gives suitable excuse for it that, "he hadn't been paid his salary in six months" (p.33). This is the pathetic condition of 'Right to Education' in India where, "children were sitting in class, vast number of them could not read, write or perform basic arithmetic, to say nothing of those who were not in school at all....." and these thing are worse in villages than cities.

Lack of awareness for education and poor family background is another cause of this pathetic condition of 'Right to Education'. Parents believe that Mid-Day Meal's "porridge isn't enough. Because if I sent my child to herd a buffalo, at least he'll make 3 rupees" (Sengupta).

Balram is an intelligent student and, truly, he is the bright future of India but he gives- up his schooling and compelled to render his services in the village tea stall like "human spiders" (p.51) where he washes utensils, crushes coal, wipes tables and is forced to do menial jobs. Because, due to the poor condition of family, his family takes a heavy loan for his cousin- sister Reena's lavish marriage and expensive dowry from the Stork. No doubt, poverty creates darkness in the rural areas and only underclass people of darkness are greatly affected by this evil. But this darkness does not affect the lavish life of upper class people. This thing is also highlighted in the episode of Balram mother's death and funeral. Underclass only gets the opportunity to use ornaments and elegant cloths at the time of their funeral. Balram explains this condition very sympathetically in the time of his mother's funeral:

My mother's body had been wrapped from head to toe in a saffron silk cloth, which was Covered In rose petals and jasmine garlands." I don't think she had ever had such a fine Thing to wear in her life. (Her death was so grand that I knew, all at once, that her life Must have been miserable.) (p.16)

Adiga presents through Vikram Halwai, father of Balram, the social as well as physical condition of an underclass man who always suffers in the grip of poverty, and whose livelihood indulges in hard physical work. Balram explains compassionately the physical condition of his father, who works very hard from morning till night for his and his family's life:

A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. *Ours* are Different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in village to pull Water from wells; the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog's collar; Cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, Reaching down below his hipbones into buttocks. The story of a poor man's life is written On his body, in a sharp pen. (p. 26-27)

Balram always tries to escape from this exploited place and one day he gets hired as a driver for Ashok who is a rich village landlord's son, daughter- in- law, and the two Pomeranian puppies Puddles and Cuddles. Now, he renders his services to Gurgaon, one of the shining and bright metropolitan city of NCR regions and the land of immense wealth and opportunities. But, after couple of months, he finds the ugly face of realities here. Among the shopping malls, massive traffic jams, sleepless night with cockroaches and mosquitoes, call centers, the 36,000,004 gods and the westernizing fashions, he encountered with corrupt, self- centered and unethical people in this India of Light. Adiga comments on Delhi, "The main thing to know about Delhi is that the roads are good, and the people are bad. The police are totally rotten. If they see you without a seat belt, you'll have to bribe them a hundred rupees." (p. 124) And with the effect of these things an innocent and rustic urban man has become a new selfish, opportunist, criminal and money minded man.

These changes in the attitude and personality of innocent human beings kill the humanistic aspect of their life, because they have only two ways for surviving, whether they opt ideal way for living the life from which they always remain in exploited underclass condition or they opt next path to destroy their humanistic approach for uplifting their condition and living the life. The journey and experiences of an ambitious underclass boy, Balram, for the quest and voraciousness of power from his native place Laxmangarh to Dhanbad then to Delhi and ultimately to Bangalore proves above point. Balram admits in the novel:

All these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr. Ashok. He returned From America an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him- and once the master of The Honda City becomes corrupted, how can the driver stay innocent? (p.197)

Drought is like a curse for village and rural areas. It not only increases the problems of the villagers but, due to evil effect of this, the condition of the entire village become worse. The villagers are compelled to leave the village and head on towards big cities like Delhi, Dhanbad, Calcutta, Gaya and Bangalore for their livelihood. They get a little money after performing some menial jobs like laboures, workers, coolies, drivers and waiters, and then returned back to their respective villages. But they are not satisfied with their remuneration because they have faced exploitation and humiliation there and in lieu of their hard work they get a very less wage. This is the description of Balram's village where the hardships of the people is greater than their life. In the novel, Adiga comments when the villagers return back to Laxmangarh from metropolitan cities:

A month before the rains, the men came back from Dhanbad and Delhi and Calcutta, Leaner, darker, angrier, but with money in their pockets. The women were waiting for Them. They hid behind the door, and as soon as the men walked in, they pounced, like Wildcats on a slab of flesh. There was fighting and wailing and shrieking. My uncle Would resist, and managed to keep some of their money, but my father got peeled and Skinned every time. "I survived the city, but I couldn't survive the women in my home," he would say, sunk into a corner of the room. The women would feed him after they fed the buffalo. (p.26)

Balram has also suffered in the village due to the ill health system. Balram's father suffers from "Tuberculosis" (p.50). His deep and vacant eyes, skeleton like physical appearance, spitting blood and crippling walk indicates that his health has become worse and needs the medical treatment. But unfortunately, the medical facility is not good in Laxmangarh "although there are three different foundation stones for hospitals, laid by three different politicians before three different election" (p.47). Somehow Balram and his brother, with the help of a boatman, manage to take their ill father to Lohia Universal Free Hospital on the other side of the river. The Great Socialists inaugurated this hospital because they want to get benefit of votes from the underclass people. But the hospital is not capable of curing any disease because of poor hygiene and scarcity of doctors whose aim has got change and they prefer to render their services in a private hospital instead of a village. Balram tells the condition of the village hospital through these words,

Cat has tasted blood. A couple of Muslim men had spread a newspaper on the ground and Were sitting on it. One of them had an open wound on his leg. He invited us to sit with Him and his friend. Kishan and I lowered father onto the newspaper sheets. We waited There..... the Muslim men kept adding newspapers to the ground, and the ground, and the Line of diseased eyes, raw wounds, and delirious mouths kept growing. (p. 48-49)

India is the only country in the world which is having its own democratic set- up for largest population and the fantastic symbol of this democracy is 'Election'. But, this has only increased the suffering of underclass because only the power is being transferred from one hand to another after conducting every election and the condition of the underclass always remains unchanged. They always struggle for their basic needs of the life. Adiga comments, "Typhoid, cholera and election fever the three main diseases of this country and the last one the worst; it makes people talk and talk about things that they have no say in" (p.98). In Laxmangarh, instead of ninety- three criminal charges, some are more brutal like murder, rape, gun smuggling, pimping, kidnapping and many more, the Great Socialist always "ruled the

Darkness, winning election after election" (p. 97). After the election the poor villagers discuss on it like, "eunuchs discussing the *Kama Sutra*" (p.98). Before starting the election, the politicians give assurance to common people for better life, hygienic and healthy life, furnish metal road, the basic needs of life, good medical facility, school in approaching distance, electricity, drinking water etc. only for getting power and win the election. But they forget all their promises and assurance after winning election and the problems of the common people still remain untouched. In his frustration, Balram accepts: "I am India's most faithful voter, and I still have not seen in the inside of a voting booth" (p.102). He also shows his agony for this corrupted democratic set up which creates two destinies: "eat- or eaten up" (p.64) and this system completely unfruitful for those people who are in the margin of society. He believes that due to this contaminated democracy and politics India is lagging behind from the other countries of this world. He says, "this fucked up system called parliamentary democracy. Otherwise, we'd be just like China." (p. 156) Since the independence, only those who were having economic and political power exploited underclass and became more powerful. It did not, "matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an Untouchable- anyone with a big belly could rise up" (p.64) and the greediness for power is continuously running like an undercurrent in vein of corrupt politician.

Landlord ship (Zamindari), which is still existed in our society after completing sixty- six years of independence, is one of the reasons of underclass suffering. For highlighting the village's suffering, Adiga created four corrupt, devil landlords namely Buffalo, stork, Wild boar and Raven. The first one, Buffalo was lustful for economic power and "eaten up the rickshaws and the roads. So if you ran a rickshaw, or used a road, you had to pay him his feed- one – third of whatever you earned, no less" (p.25). Stork was the second who showed his possession on "the river that flowed outside the village, and he took a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river, and a toll from every boatman who crossed the river" (p.24- 25) and wanted to step down in the land of the village.

The third and brother of Stork, Wild Boar was having his owned good quality agricultural lands in the village and every villager "had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages" and "when he passed by a woman, his car would stop; the window would roll down to reveal his grin" (p.25) for lust of woman. The fourth and last one is the Raven, who possessed dry worst land which was located in "rocky hillside around the fort, and took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their flocks. If they didn't have their money, he liked to dip his beak into their backside." (p.25) To get rid of these exploitation and humiliation Balram escaped from his village and reached to Delhi, the capital and one of the prominent city of India.

The struggle story of Balram does not stop in Delhi where he had come in the search of better opportunity and life. He faces a lot of mental exploitation and humiliation here. He always encounters with corrupt police, legal and administrative system, non- cooperative behaviour of society and suspicious nature of his master as the reward of their work. Adiga presents the corrupt face of Indian police, weak legal and administrative structure through hit and run case committed by Pinky.

The corrupt police men shift this crime from Pinky to Balram and, in lieu of this, get huge amount of money from Ashok as a bribe. Balram comments on jail, "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle- class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse" (p.169). The judges also a part of such type of rackets and ignore forced confession because, "They take their bribe, they ignore the discrepancies in the case." And the underclass people's discriminated and exploited "life goes on" (p.169). The life of Delhi makes corrupt to innocent Ashok who came from America. Adiga says in his interview:

The past fifty years have seen tumultuous changes in India's society, and these changes-Many of which are for the better- have overturned the traditional hierarchies, and the old Securities of life. A lot of poorer Indians are left confused and perplexed by the new India That is being formed around them. (Excerpted Interview)

In spite of all these things, the pollution of cities, frantic life schedule, the impact of corrupt city- culture and life, the glamour of metropolitan cities and underclass people's helplessness for uplifting their condition ignites their minds with anger, protest, vengeance, depression and frustration.

Aravind Adiga's powerful novel *The White Tiger* is the story of an underclass boy Balram's suffering and struggle. This is not only the story of Balram but it can be the story of many underclass boys. But the story of Balram is different from the others because he keeps his dreams alive and sustains them inside. Like the white tiger, who takes birth once in the breed of tiger, he breaks out his cage and becomes a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. He is a true 'Karma Yogi' who has not surrendered himself in front of the difficult and worst condition. In the every episode of the novel he keeps himself indulging in different actions which are created as the suitable path for success. Although he has committed a crime but this crime is the result of his frustration and agony which he has suffered since childhood. After achieving the zenith of entrepreneurship, he has kept alive the sense of humanity. In his sense of humanity, he wants to, "sell everything, take the money, and start a school- an English- language school- for poor children in Bangalore" (p.319).

CONCLUSIONS

Aravind Adiga's powerful novel *The White Tiger* is the story of an underclass boy Balram's suffering and struggle. This is not only the story of Balram but it can be the story of many underclass boys. But the story of Balram is different from the others because he keeps his dreams alive and sustains them inside. Like the white tiger, who takes birth once in the breed of tiger, he breaks out his cage and becomes a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. He is a true 'Karma Yogi' who has not surrendered himself in front of the difficult and worst condition. In the every episode of the novel he keeps himself indulging in different actions which are created as the suitable path for success. Although he has committed a crime but this crime is the result of his frustration and agony which he has suffered since childhood. After achieving the zenith of entrepreneurship, he has kept alive the sense of humanity. In his sense of humanity, he wants to, "sell everything, take the money, and start a school- an English- language school- for poor children in Bangalore" (p.319).

REFERENCES

1. Abbas, Khwaja Ahmed. *Tomorrow is Ours! A novel of the India of Today*. Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1943
2. Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India with India Today Group. 2008.
3. *The Sunday Times of India*, New Delhi: April 6. 2008
4. Bartwal, D.M. The Unveiling Face of Materialism in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. *Global Journal of English Language and Literature*. October 2013. Volume 1. Issue 3. ISSN 2320-4397.
5. "Excerpted Interview with Aravind Adiga." www.redroomlibrary.com/2008_10_01_archive.html. Red Room Library, 23 October 2008. Web. 17 December 2013
6. Ivasheva, Valentina. *On the Threshold of Twenty- First Century*. Moscow: Progress Publication, 1978
7. Prasannarajan, S. "Alone in Duskland". *India Today* October 27, 2008. Print

8. Rushby, Kevin. "His Monster's Voice."
www.theguardian.com/books/2008/apr/19/featuresreviews.guardianreview19. The Guardian, 19 April, 2008.
Web. 12 December, 2013
9. Sengupta, Somini. "Education India's Poor." www.nytimes.com/2008/01/17/world/asia/17india.html New York Times, 17 January, 2008. Web. 16 December, 2013
10. Urban, G. R. *Can We Survive Our Future?* London: The Bodley Head Ltd., 1971
11. Volkov, G.N. *The era of Robots or the Era of Man?* Moscow, 1965

